restores Carbondale's old timepiece

everyone because it has been done with money from their pockets," the 23-year-old tower clock repairman told the NEWS last week while he sat in his hotel room at the Hotel Chellino.

"At other places I am usually the only one around when I'm working. Maybe a janitor will come around, but that's about it. I never saw this many people so interested," Rogers recalled. "I haven't been alone since I started working. People like Tom Brennan are really great for morale while I work on this clock."

Having learned the rare trade from his father, Bert Rogers who founded the company back in the mid-1950s and worked on the same Carbondale tower clock, Robert now runs the firm by himself. His father passed away just three months ago, leaving Robert to carry on the successful business in his footsteps.

With the help of assistant Tom Lengel, a good friend who lives in Harrisburg near Robert, the tower clock repairman services over 100 clocks from Maine to South Carolina.

"In junior high I picked up the trade by going on many jobs with my father. By the time I graduate from high school I had pretty much mastered the trade. I had no interest in college, but I took a few vo-tech classes and developed a good background in the electrician field. And of course, I learned an awful lot from my father," Robert stated respectfully.

Asked about what kind of shape the Carbondale clock, a 66-year-old one made by the Benchley Howard Company in Boston, was in Robert reported it should last quite a few more years.

"It's in very good shape. After I fine tune it I don't see any reason why it shouldn't give you 75 more years of service," he said. At that very moment last Tuesday night the clock was lit and running, telling Carbondale once more what time it was.

Commenting more on the city hall time piece, Robert estimated now that it was repaired, the clock was worth about $15,000.

"But you couldn't get any clock built today like the one this city has. They just don't make them anymore. And the ones they do make, well, you just don't get the quality they put into the older clocks, which makes them priceless, really."

His work took just two days to start the clock and a few more hours to fine tune it and start the bell tolling last Wednesday morning. Robert had to return later in the week to adjust the bell striker which stopped for awhile, but after replacing a mercury tube box every part worked properly, completing another successful restoration and repair effort for him and his assistant.

Robert services many tower and church clocks, including the ones at the Holy Trinity Church in Simpson, the Lackawanna County Courthouse in Scranton, the Norfolk U.S. Naval Base, Bloomsburg State College and the Bromo Seltzer Building in Baltimore. This list goes on and on ...

"There aren't people who know how to do this. Business is getting better and better because people are doing what Carbondale is -- restoring older clocks that haven't run in awhile. All of the business usually comes about by referals, just like this job did," he explained.

Just how much does he like his rare occupation?

"I'd be crazy to get behind a desk for a 9-to-5 job," the young man laughed. "Here I'm my own boss. If I don't work I don't eat. The travelling is nice and I have yet to hunt work, my new jobs find me like this one did. Referrals are the way the business has spread so well in maintaining the 110 or so clocks I work on."

Explaining how he repaired the clock, Robert said he took every part possible off the frame and cleaned each one and put all the gears and pieces back together. He painted the frame with his assistant Tom, replaced two small motors and a mercury tube box that controls the bellstriker, did some electrical wiring and also supplied a new photocell to control the timing of the lights which go on at night.

The repairs all sounded simple the way Robert explained it. "They do sound simple, but there is quite a bit you have to know to fix them right, and not too many people in the country know how these works. That is why the business does so well," Robert pointed out.

And Robert does his business well, as all the residents of Carbondale will attest to every time they hear the hour bell toll what time it is -- a sound they can thank many people for, especially Robert Rogers.